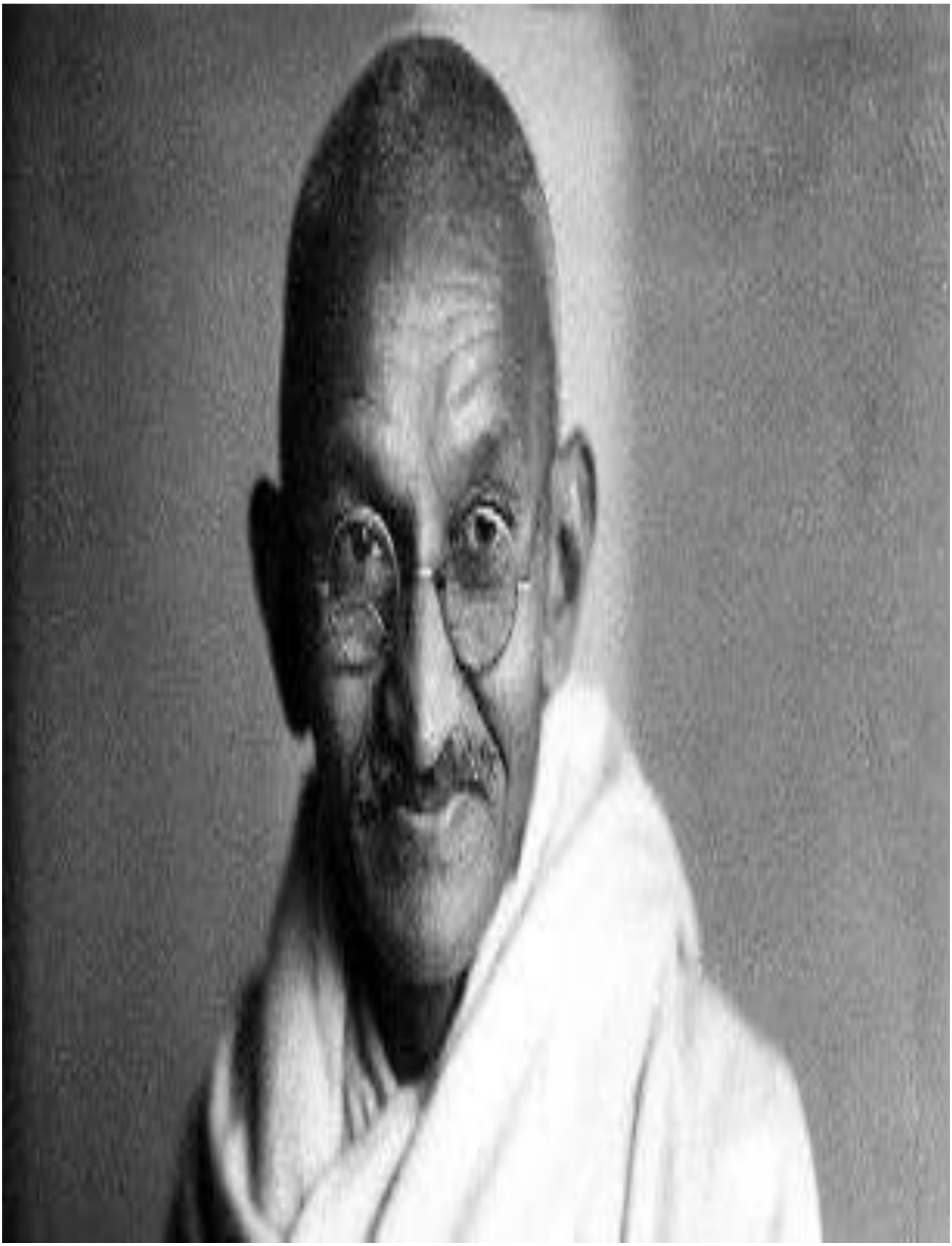

Mahatma Gandhi was the leader who guided India towards Independence. India was under the British rule for over 250 years. Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 at the request of Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

Gandhi's contribution to the Indian freedom movement cannot be measured in words. He, along with other freedom fighters, compelled the British to leave India. His policies and agendas were non-violent and his words were the source of inspiration for millions.

On his 147th birth anniversary, let's look at Mahatma Gandhi's famous contributions to Indian freedom movement:

1. World War I

Lord Chelmsford, the then Viceroy of India, invited Gandhi to Delhi at a War Conference. In order to gain the trust of the empire, Gandhi agreed to move people to enlist in the army for World War I. However, he wrote to the Viceroy and said that he "personally will not kill or injure anybody, friend or foe".

2. Champaran

The Champaran agitation in Bihar was Gandhi's first active involvement into Indian freedom politics. The Champaran farmers were being forced to grow Indigo and were being tortured if they protested. The farmers sought Gandhi's help and through a calculated non-violent protest, Gandhi managed to win concessions from the authority.

3. Kheda

When Kheda, a village in Gujarat, was badly hit by floods, the local farmers appealed to the rulers to waive off the taxes. Here, Gandhi started a signature campaign where peasants pledged non-payment of taxes. He also arranged a social boycott of the mamlatdars and talatdars (revenue officials). In 1918, the Government relaxed the conditions of payment of revenue tax until the famine ended.

4. Khilafat Movement

Gandhi's influence on the Muslim population was remarkable. This was evident in his involvement in the Khilafat Movement. After the first World War, the Muslims feared for the safety of their Caliph or religious leader and a worldwide protest was being organised to fight against the collapsing status of the Caliph. Gandhi became a prominent spokesperson of the All India Muslim Conference and returned the medals he had received from the Empire during his Indian Ambulance Corps days in South Africa. His role in the Khilafat made him a national leader in no time.

5. Non-cooperation Movement

Gandhi had realised that the British had been able to be in India only because of the co-operation they received from the Indians. Keeping this in mind, he called for a non-cooperation movement. With the Congress' support and his indomitable spirit, he convinced people that peaceful non-cooperation was the key to Independence. The ominous day of Jallianwala Bagh Massacre triggered the non-cooperation movement. Gandhi set the goal of Swaraj or self-governance, which since then became the motto of Indian freedom movement.

6. Salt March

Also known as the Dandi Movement, Gandhi's Salt March is considered to be a pivotal incident in the history of freedom struggle. At the Calcutta Congress of 1928, Gandhi declared that the British must grant India dominion status or the country will erupt into a revolution for complete independence. The British did not pay heed to this. As a result, on December 31, 1929, the Indian flag was unfurled in Lahore and the next January 26 was celebrated as the Indian Independence Day. Then, Gandhi started a Satyagraha campaign against the salt tax in March 1930. He marched 388 kilometres from Ahmedabad to Dandi in Gujarat to make salt. Thousands of people joined him and made it one of the biggest marches in Indian history.

7. Quit India Movement

During the Second World War, Gandhi was determined to strike the British Empire with a definitive blow that would secure their exit from India. This happened when the British started recruiting Indians for the war. Gandhi protested strongly and said that the Indians cannot be involved in a war that is in favour of democratic purposes when India itself is not a free country. This argument exposed the two-faced image of the colonisers and within half a decade, they were out of this country.